



Put a Bounce in Your Step

POOLED BANK shots have always reminded me of a body-builder's latissimus dorsi (the upper-back muscles that give the athlete that "V" look); there's a certain *cockiness* to both. Bank shots get hit harder than any others in the game save for the blast-break; indeed, it's often speed that helps create the desired angles. The game of bank pool has precious little use for low gear.

The teaching of bank shots customarily begins with what your high-school geometry teacher would have called "bisecting the angle." Which, along with "angle out equals angle in," is a nice concept if you're playing pool on mirrors. Most of the time, though, your opponent is going to insist on a pool table for a battleground, and that's where geometry begins to fail. Playing conditions, speed and spin all enter into the equation. Most published teaching on the subject is extremely simplistic, and print is probably not the optimal medium in the first place. If you're going to teach bank shots right, you're going to need sound and motion.

Which is why Freddy "The Beard" Bentivegna's new DVD, "Banks That Don't Go — But Do," is such a welcome addition. (I mistakenly labeled this work "Banking With The Beard" last month, and apologize accordingly. But that very title is also being developed for DVD as we speak — yet another project by the communications colossus Freddy has become.) Freddy has spent many decades rounding up the banking secrets of such playing giants as the late Gene Skinner, "Bugs" Rucker, and "Jersey Red" Breit, and unlike most money players, he is quite prepared to share.

Many of the shots taught here are not apparent to the untrained eye, and are created by spin, cue-ball direction, or a combination of the two. The most intriguing lessons are those involving one-pocket's cross-corner banks. As long as I've been around, the prevailing wisdom has always been, "If the cue-ball/object-ball line points at the center of the corner pocket — and nowhere else — then the ball is bankable into the opposite corner, with no fear of an interfering 'kiss.' But if that line is off by as little as a quarter-inch, then the kiss-out is almost certain." Freddy debunks that; you can complete those off-line cross-corners, but it's going to take some changes in your basic technique.

He teaches not only different strokes for different shots, but differing bridges and grips to complement those strokes as well. If you own stock in the company that manufactures Pepto-Bismol, rejoice; this publication's Robert Byrne will be keeping sales brisk for quite some time to come.

The only previous responsible bank-pool instruction on film or DVD came from Grady Mathews. And while his work does include shots you won't find here, all Mathews really does is point out that those shots are available and can be made; he doesn't tell you how. "Banks That Don't Go" fixes all that, with specific instruction as to speed, spin, and anything else Freddy thinks the shot needs. The vast majority of this disc reflects secrets that have not been

shared before, and are known only to a handful of elite players. Some you make with pure skill, some with pure knowledge, but you're going to be making a whole bunch of shots you would never have dreamed of even trying.

What an industry Freddy is now! I spent my entire career in marketing communications, and I never had as many simultaneous projects as he's juggling today. Clothes. Books. DVDs. Inexpensive yet high-quality cues. A Web site. Daily blogs. The way he's going, he could become pool's answer to Oprah (most likely, minus the cash).

The other instructional opus highly deserving of "props" this month is "The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards" by BD's own David "Dr. Dave" Alciatore, a mechanical engineering professor. Dr. Dave is one of our most popular instructional columnists and one of the leading posters on the "Cue Chalk Board" forum on BD's Web site, no doubt due to his incredible generosity when it comes to sharing his knowledge. (How many cue-game publications do you suppose there are whose writing staffs include a physicist, a lawyer, and two graduate engineers?) Except for their apparent mutual Italian heritage and love of pool, he has nothing in common with Bentivegna. The latter's instruction comes from decades of high-stakes play, instincts, observations, and the teachings of older players. Alciatore's work, by contrast, largely depends on good old-fashioned science. The nuances of spin, cling, squirt, swerve and "squerve" (the dreaded combination of squirt and swerve) have never been analyzed and explained as masterfully.

Because my father hounded me about taking physics all the way through high school, I avoided the subject as though it were snake venom, and am thus probably not the ideal subject for teaching on this plane. Dr. Dave writes well of pool's basics, but it's not until Chapter 4, "Spin and English," that his instruction really begins to sing. And he's equally masterful at integrating his scientific knowledge with on-the-table playing instruction. "Illustrated Principles" introduces over 80 playing principles, plus more than 250 illustrations and photographs. There's also a companion CD, with the same title, containing over 150 video clips and 20 technical proofs of his teachings.

I've lost track of all the stories I've heard of players who got angry with other players for sharing the game's secrets. The late Charlie Cacciapaglia of Rockford, Ill., one-time mentor to Hall-of-Famer Dallas West, was furious with his charge for becoming a successful pool teacher. And the immortal Willie Mosconi, who spent his entire adolescence in the Great Depression and needed the suckers to stay ignorant so he could help keep his family afloat, was notoriously close-mouthed about dispensing advice; indeed, "always play with better players" and "practice the circle drill" are his only known instructions after all those years in the limelight. Those were two Italians who clearly didn't want to share the joy. Be glad that today we have two who do.